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ABSTRACT

A study explored the question of the development of recall for narrative and informative texts. Subjects, 60 5th- 8th-, and 11th-grade students from a rural area of Quebec, representing all levels of achievement, were presented with an informative text and a narrative text. Results indicated that: (1) the narrative text elicited a longer recall compared to the information text; (2) the two older groups had a longer recall than the youngest group; and (3) the recall of the narrative text underwent fewer changes than the recall of the informative text. Findings suggest that the differences in performance of the younger students resided more in a quantitative aspect (amount of recall) than in a qualitative aspect (categories of text). (Four figures of data are included.) (Author/RS)

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RECALL OF NARRATIVE AND INFORMATIVE TEXTS BY FIFTH, EIGHTH AND ELEVENTH GRADES STUDENTS.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the question of the development of recall for two types of texts: narrative and informative, by fifth, eighth and eleventh grades students. The results indicate that the narrative text elicits a longer recall compared to the informative text and that the two older groups have a longer recall than the younger group. Also the recall of the narrative text seems to undergo less changes then the recall of the informative text. Finally results show that the differences in the performance of the younger students reside more in a quantitative aspect (amount of recall) than in a qualitative aspect (categories of text).

INTRODUCTION

From research on schemata (Minsky, 1975, Kintsch, 1974, Anderson 1980, Rumelhart, 1980) we know that the reader uses large cognitive units to help himself or herself to set up tracks. These schemata are established by generalizing on day-to-day experiences. Through his or her experiences, an individual thus acquires a large number of schemata representing various situations in their canonical form. The schemata are used to interpret linguistic data, to retrieve information from memory, to organize actions, to determine goals and, in general, to guide the information processing. Because of its intrinsic properties, the schemata therefore plays a major role in text comprehension.

In a developmental approach researchers such as Brown and Smiley (1977) Fayol (1985) and Denhière (1980, 1987) look at the way children analyze, summarize and recall information from texts. According to their findings, the skill to make a hierarchical recall starts around the age of 7 or 8, but we also know that this ability depends largely on the type of text children read. In addition, Children like adults tend to better recall the setting, the initiating event and the consequence or the resolution of the story but the reaction and the attempt are not as easily recalled. Recent research also suggest that a narrative text differs from an informative text on the basis of text structure as well as in the cognitive strategies used in extracting the meaning from the texts. At this point we already know that young children have internalized the schemata necessary to comprehend narratives, however it has not yet been determined at what age the children internalized the structure of an informative text. Meyer (1979) has argued that the skill to comprehend an informative text is not fully mastered before grade 9. In this study we thus address the question of the development of recall for two types of texts: narrative and informative, by fifth, eighth and eleventh grades students.

METHOD

All the students came from a rural area of Québec, and were divided into three groups according to their school levels: fifth grade (age 10-11), eighth grade (age 14-15) and eleventh grade (age 17-18). There was no prior selection of students, therefore we had students from all levels of achievement. Sixty students participated in this study, 20 in each group. Two texts were presented: one informative text (La marguerite) and one narrative text (La parure). Both texts came from a fifth-grade workbook and had their surface characteristics adapted in order to be equivalent. A propositional analysis was also done producing approximately the same number of semantic propositions (La marguerite: 268, La parure: 286). The experiment was done in two sessions of 90 minutes each. At the first session, the informative text was distributed to half the students, while the other half receive the narrative one. At the second session, the students receive the opposite text. The range of delay of the recall varied between 5 minutes and 18 minutes depending on the student's speed of reading.

RESULTS

1- Length of recall: Our preliminary results indicate that the students produced much less propositions in their recall compared to the original number of propositions contained in the texts they had previously read. This tendency is stressed more for the fifth-grade students since the length of their recall (total number of propositions) for the informative text is about 1|8 of that of the original text (mean number of propositions= 31.85) and the length of their recall for the narrative text is about 1|5 of the original text (mean number of propositions= 61.95). For the two other groups which had very similar results, the length of recall for the informative text is about 1|3 of that of the original text (mean number of proposition= 91.5 and 95.9 for grades eight and eleven respectively) and the length of their recall for the narrative text is about 1/2 of that of the original text (mean number of propositions= 142.25 and 145.85 for grades eight and eleven respectively). The analysis of variance show that there is a significant difference between the three school levels ($F= 108.4$, $df= 2$, $p<0.0001$) and also between the two types of texts ($F= 89.39$, $df=1$, $p< 0.0001$) but there is no significant interaction between the two factors ($F= 2.15$, $df= 2$, $p= 0.126$). The Scheffé test indicates that there are significant differences both between the fifth-grade students and the eighth-grade and between the fifth-grade and the eleventh-grade students (alpha= 0.05 level). See figure 1.

2- Ratios of the number of identical propositions relative to the total number of propositions: Because in the near future we will be interested in analyzing different kinds of information the students add in their recalls, such as types of inferences, elaborations, etc., it is important to know in which proportion students recall identical propositions (information which had been recalled literally from the original texts) relative their total recall. The results show the same pattern as did the previous results. The mean percentages (mean number of identical propositions/ the mean of the total number of propositions) are the following: for the fifth-grade students: 30.55 % and 35.05%; for the eighth-grade students: 42.8% and 43.35%; and for the eleventh-grade students: 35.80% and 41.40%, for the informative and narrative texts respectively. The analysis of variance indicate significant differences for the two factors concerned: types of texts ($F= 4.15$. $df= 1$, $p= 0.0463$) and school levels ($F= 11.65$, $df= 2$, $p < 0.0001$) and no significant interaction between factors ($F= 0.77$, $df=2$, $p= 0.4659$). The Scheffé test indicates significant differences both between the fifth-grade students and the eighth-grade students, and between the fifth-grade and the eleventh-grade students (alpha= 0.05). See figure 2.

3- Narrative structure and recall: As previous researchers already found results indicate that some categories of the narrative text are less easily recalled than other categories. For example the attempt and the reaction are not very well recalled compare to the internal response and the internal plan. Also the fourth episode is for the three groups more easily forget Those patterns seem to be constant over age. See figure 3 and 4.

DISCUSSION:

The first result means that the narrative text elicits a longer recall compared to the informative text and that the two older groups have a longer recall than the younger group, but the eighth and eleventh grades do not differ one from another. The second result indicates that the younger students tend to change or add more informations to what was previously presented in the texts they read, this resulting in a less accurate recall, but the two other groups again do not differ one from another and tend to keep closer to the exact wording of the propositions of the target texts. Also the recall of the narrative text seems to undergo less changes then the recall of the informative text. From these results and the last result we can affirm that the differences in the performance of the younger students reside more in a quantitative aspect (amount of recall) than in a qualitative aspect (categories of text).

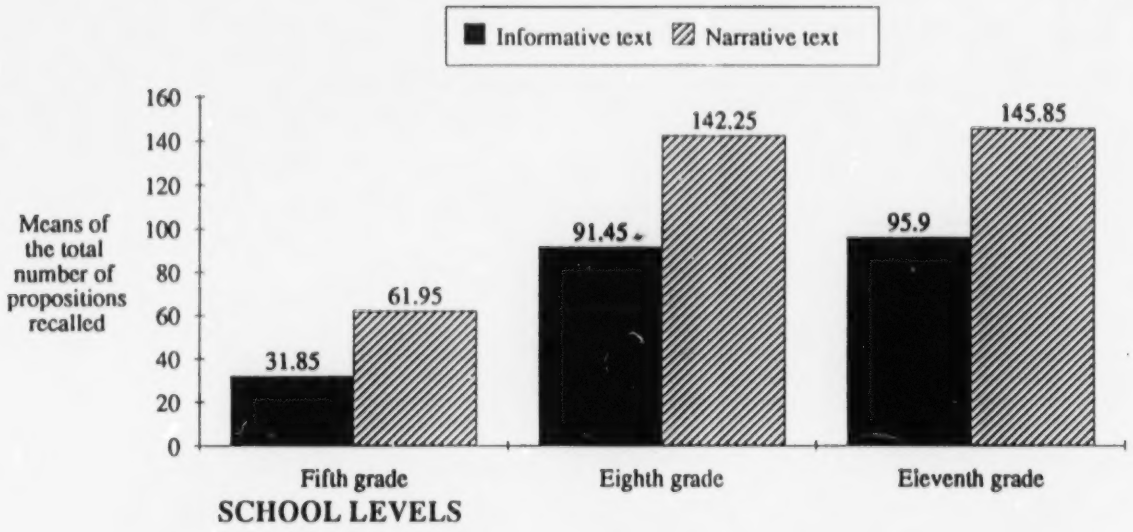

Fig. 1: Means of the total number of propositions recalled for the informative and narrative texts by students of fifth grade, eighth grade and eleventh grade (delay of reca

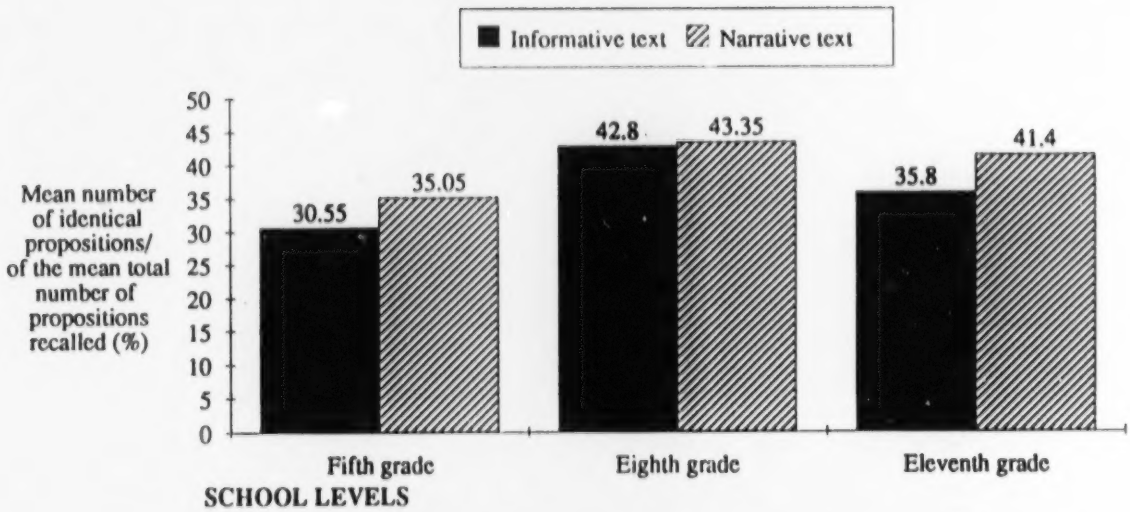

Fig. 2: Mean number of identical propositions recalled|mean of the total number of propositions recalle for the informative and narrative texts by students of fifth, eighth and eleventh grades (delay of recall=! m.)

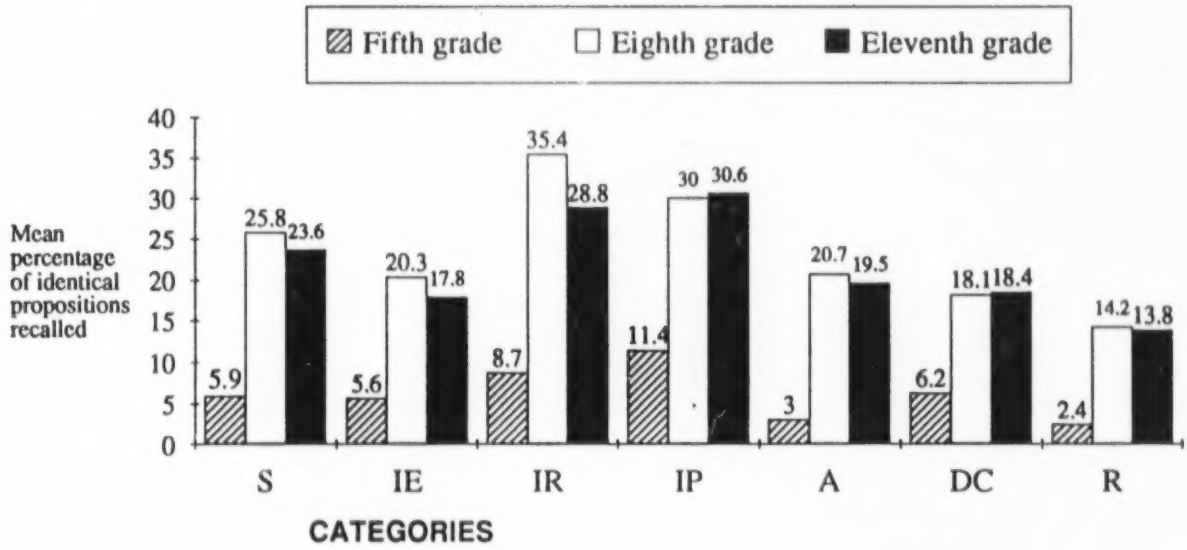

Fig.3: Mean percentages of identical propositions recalled for categories of tl narrative text by students of the fifth, eighth and eleventh grades (delay of

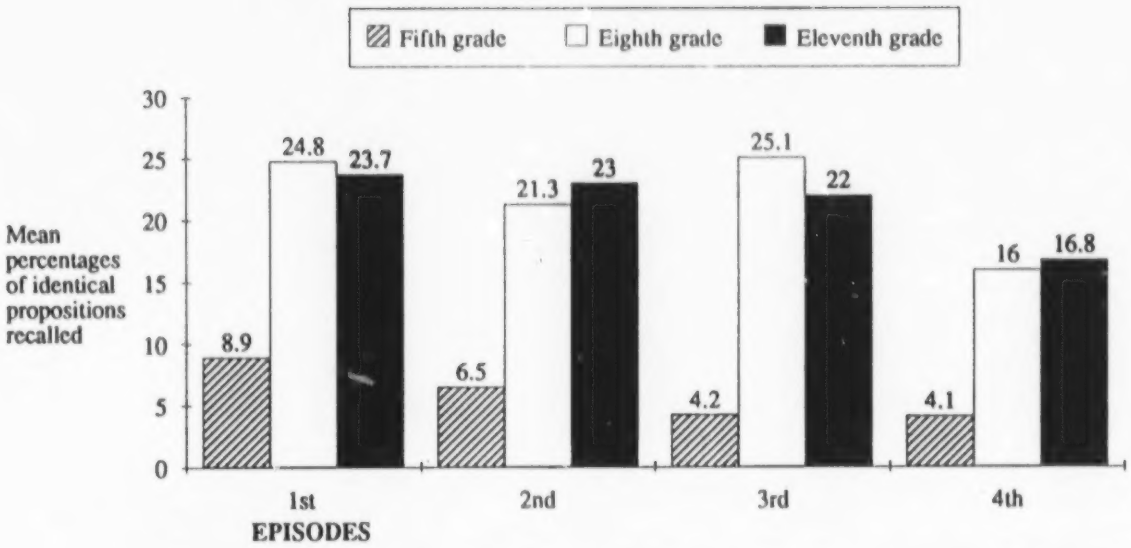

Fig. 4: Mean percentages of identical propositions recalled for the four episodes of the narrative text b students of the fifth, eighth and eleventh grades (delay of recall=5-18 minutes).